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Can Institutions of Autonomy Become Potentially “Subversive Institutions”?¹

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Abstract

Institutions of autonomy³ in ethnically heterogeneous states have been conceived as a compromise between a desire to safeguard state unity and to partially accommodate the grievances of ethno-linguistic minorities. However, in practice, the institutions of autonomy often turn into a nucleus of a proto state of the ethno-linguistic minority. Instead of resolving the minority issue and stabilising the central state, they strengthen the local nationalism and secessionism, acting as centrifugal forces, or “subversive institutions”. Recently these processes have been noticed in several ethnically heterogeneous, developed Western democracies. The purpose of this paper is to analyse whether, and how, the institutions of autonomy influence the rise of peripheral nationalism and secessionism.

KEY WORDS:

Peripheral nationalism, secessionism, autonomy, ethno-federalism, subversive institutions, Spanish and French Basque Country

1 This article has been developed from a PhD thesis defended at the University of Zagreb in 2016 under the title “Politics of National Identity. Cases of Spanish and French Basque Country”.

2 The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the views of the author's employer, The Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia.

3 For the purpose of this article, institutions of autonomy are defined as institutions of territorial autonomy. They are designed on the one hand, to accommodate the grievances of distinct ethno-linguistic groups, as is the cases of the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia in Spain, and Quebec in Canada. The latter are considered distinct “nacionalidades” under the Spanish Constitution of 1978, and possess a separate language, co-official with the Castilian Spanish. On the other hand, in other cases, these institutions are designed to accommodate the local/regional or historical specifics, as is the case of other Spanish Autonomous Communities, like Madrid, Murcia or Aragon, or other Canadian provinces, like Manitoba or Alberta. Of course, with the autonomy, the state grants to autonomous institutions not only a high level of cultural/linguistic autonomy, but also devolves a high degree of state powers in many areas. The autonomous communities are also endowed with representative and state-like (in symbolic and real terms) institutions, like a local Parliament, prime minister, Government, police, etc. Thus the Autonomous Communities of the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia in Spain, and Quebec in Canada, become a “segment-state” or “proto-nation-state” (Roeder 2007; 2009) or “state-in-the-making” (Bunce 1999) for their respective ethnic groups. We can talk here, at least partially (in the mentioned three cases of the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, and Quebec in Canada) about “ethno-federalism”. One has to bear in mind that Spain is officially not a federation, but another term is used, “Estado Autonómico” (Autonomous State, State of Autonomous).

Valerie Bunce and “subversive institutions”

In the last couple of years, the rise of secessionism in several democratic Western European countries – from the United Kingdom (Scotland) and Belgium (Flanders) to Spain (Catalonia and the Basque Country) – has been noted. All of them have something in common. In addition to having a heterogeneous ethnic structure, that is, the existence of distinct historical ethnic communities, all of these states also have, in the last couple of decades, gone through dramatic administrative and structural changes. From the unitary states they had once been, they have transformed in a way that has resulted in the introduction of either a certain degree of devolution or even in federalization. Consequently, historical ethnic communities achieved a certain degree and institutions of autonomy, ranging from a partial and asymmetric decentralization (“devolution”), as in the case of Scotland, to the extensive autonomy of the so-called *autonomous communities* of Spain. The intention of the central state and the legislator was, among other political reasons, to safeguard state unity and strengthen the state by accommodating the grievances of ethnic communities and their elites.

The final outcome, however, has often been adverse to the initial intentions. In the newly formed administrative units, the “proto-states” of the ethnic minorities, there has been a rise in nationalism and secessionism. The purpose of this paper is to try to tackle this phenomenon and explore the causal relationship between autonomy and nationalism/secessionism. That is, the question whether the autonomy itself strengthened nationalism and secessionism in the autonomous territories will be examined. In this paper, although several examples will be mentioned, the focus will be on Basque Country, where stronger peripheral nationalism and secessionism have been noted in its Spanish part, whereas they are almost non-existent in its French part. It seems to be a good example of a mini case study of most similar systems (Przeworski and Teune 1970), in order to test the hypothesis about the institutions of autonomy being “subversive institutions”.

The research relies on Valerie Bunce's theory of “subversive institutions”, which she tested on the cases of the former communist federations of the Soviet Union (USSR), Czechoslovakia (CSFR), and Yugoslavia (SRFY).

Her theory has been applied on Spain and its quasi-federal structure of so-called autonomous communities (*comunidades autónomas*), or in Spanish jargon, *Autonomías*. Spanish *autonomías*, being in a way and maybe to a lesser extent similar to the former republics of the ex-socialist federations, provide a kind of framework of a proto-state, a nation-state, a "state-in-waiting", and strengthen the centrifugal forces and local nationalism. Spanish Basque Country, *Autonomous Community País Vasco-Euskadi*, enjoys many prerogatives and symbols of a state. For example, its language enjoys the status of the official language of the local administration, together with (Castilian) Spanish. It has its own administration, which develops even its own paradiplomacy (Lecours 2005) and its own police force, the Ertzaintza. It has a comprehensive network of educational and cultural institutions which cherish and foster the Basque language, culture, and national spirit. It possesses a wide range of local social and economic institutions. Finally, its own Parliament develops a regional ("autonomous") party system and fosters party competition – including in local patriotism and nationalism. All this influences the development of identity, not only cultural, but also political, and strengthens the local nationalism and secessionism.

Valerie Bunce, explaining the collapse of former communist federations of the USSR, CSFR, and SFRY, subscribes to the thesis that "the very structure of the bloc and the federation put into place the necessary conditions for the rise of nations and nationalist movements in the peripheral units" (Bunce 1999: 39), and their design created the preconditions for creating states within the state and "nation-states at the republican level" (ibid 54). Consequently, the structure itself brought about the collapse of the communist bloc, and within it, of the federations of the USSR, CSFR, and SFRY.

...recognizing, or in some cases, creating a common language, by expanding education, by building a nationally defined intelligentsia, by developing at the republican level a stable core of economic, representational, coercive, social, and cultural institutions, each of which was led by powerful, durable, and "nativized" elite cadres: by providing considerable economic and political resources to these republican elites; and by enclosing all of these developments within well-defined geographical and administrative perimeters... (Bunce 1999: 49).

Therefore, Bunce holds that the federalism created nations at the republican level or, if they had already been “defined”, strengthened them. “Institutions and policies of federal socialist states were important in developing individual national identity... collective identity we associate with the ‘nation’” (ibid: 48). Federalism created “states-in-the-making, complete with their own borders, elites, national communities, and a full array of economic, political, social, and cultural institutions” (ibid: 84–85). “Regional party elites fought for their survival by distancing themselves and their republics from the centre through...combinations of nationalism” (ibid: 87). In other words, the federal structures where the autonomous/federal units enjoyed relatively wide autonomy in the long term acted centrifugally, which finally led to the collapse of the states (federations). With the advent of Gorbachev and perestroika, the consequent abandoning of the Brezhnev doctrine, and the array of events that brought upon the collapse of communism and of the federations, the federal units – the new “nations-in-the-making” – took advantage of the situation (“window of opportunity”) and proclaimed their independence.

As mentioned above, Bunce’s theory and arguments will first be applied to the situation in Spain; it will then be compared with the situation in France in order to test our hypothesis. In France, due to a different, centralized state structure and civic state, only recently loosened by a mild regionalization, there is no such phenomenon of “subversive institutions”. In that respect, the differences between the French and Spanish Basque Country will be observed, bearing in mind the relatively strong Basque nationalism and some forms of secessionism in the Spanish Basque Country, while in the French Basque Country their absence has been noticed.⁴

The other authors who have tackled or further elaborated the theory of subversive institutions will also be mentioned in the paper and their ideas grouped into three main arguments. The theory will be exposed to criticism and a short case study will be added in order to apply the theory and test the hypothesis on concrete examples. Finally, a short summary of the main ideas brought forth in the paper will be given.

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4 The most similar systems design holds that the two cases share many common features, and differ in only one. For instance, French and Spanish Basque Country are situated in the same region, share common language and ethnic origins; they are both parts of wider nation-states, face situation of *diglossia* etc. A differing feature, in this case, autonomy in the Spanish Basque Country, is held responsible for the different outcome (nationalism/secessionism).

The theory of subversive institutions in literature

The idea behind ethno-federalism, that is, a federal state wherein the federal units are designed to take into account ethnic and linguistic diversities, is to enable minorities to participate in power and to give them autonomy in order to reduce their inclination towards secession. At the same time, the intention is to diminish the risk of conflicts and other extreme and unpopular solutions, like ethnic conflicts, ethnic cleansing, population transfers, or genocide (Greer 2007: 4–7). Therefore, the aim of ethno-federalism is to “accommodate territorially based ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences in divided societies, while maintaining the territorial integrity of existing states” (Erk and Anderson 2009: 191). The question is whether such ethno-federalism can be a durable solution for divided societies, or it is just a step towards secession. Autonomous institutions are designed to appease the people urging secessionism and resolve the societal cleavages, but in reality they freeze or even exacerbate them, while providing the “nationalists with the institutional tools for eventual secession” (ibid: 192). Autonomous institutions can thus acquire the disintegrative, “subversive” character.

Roeder, a decade and a half after Valerie Bunce, elaborates in more depth the arguments of “subversive institutions theory” in his “segmental institutions thesis” (Roeder 2007; 2009), in which he produces numerous arguments against ethno-federalism. Roeder attributes to ethno-federalism a number of features that he sees as weaknesses, contributing to instability and conflict. Ethno-federal arrangements create “segment-states”, “proto-nation-states” for the ethnic groups (Roeder also uses terms “segmental institutions”, “homeland governments”, “homeland administration”, and “autonomous homelands”). In these ethno-federal arrangements, which result in creating ethno-federal states, the focus is more on arriving at a short-term compromise between the parties in the conflict (the state and the ethnic group) rather than considering the long-term effects of the new institutional arrangement. Also, “ethno-federal and autonomy compromises may lead to escalation of demands” and new institutions favour certain nation-state projects over others and thus structure “identities, capabilities and opportunities” (Roeder 2009: 208). It is not only that the “homeland institutions” are empowered and that

the central state is weakened, but also that the politicians are trapped between the two dangers – centralization on the one side, and further devolution, which may lead to dissolution, on the other. Fighting against one, they shift into another, while the society becomes polarized in a zero-sum game.

Secessionism does not appear necessarily, at least not in its extreme variant, in all cases of state transformation, devolution, and decentralization on a federal basis. Primarily it appears where there exist minorities with a well-defined national identity (Balcells et al. 2012), as in the case of the Basque Country or Catalonia. Of course, one may argue whether the acquired autonomy resulted in secessionism or the whether the latter impulse had existed before and the regions acquired autonomy in an attempt to preserve the common state. Thus, the autonomy did not accommodate and mitigate nationalism, but rather gave it a further disintegrative push, while in some areas or cases it created it from scratch.

There are of course other factors that make autonomous institutions develop a “subversive” character, apart from the institutional design itself, which some authors do not consider responsible for secessionism *per se* (Giuliano 2006). For instance, some authors attach importance to economic factors, which will be tackled later, or to the closeness of a kin state that might tacitly or overtly encourage secessionism, as in the case of Albania with regards to Kosovo; Hungary, in the case of Slovakia or Romania; or Ireland in the case of Ulster (Erk and Anderson 2009). Other authors see the danger of ethno-federalism primarily in cases where there exists a “core”, “dominant” region (Hale 2004; Erk and Anderson 2009), which will be discussed later. Nevertheless, there is a whole range of literature that supports our argument, that is, the theory of subversive institutions.

One can argue that the institutions of autonomy become “subversive” in several ways. Through the institution-building process, the autonomous region gains the institutions and symbols of a proto-state by which it strengthens and nurtures local nationalism and secessionism, and facilitates a potential secession. By means of these institutions and by using the cleavages of “official nationalism” (Anderson 1990),⁵ a subnational

5 Phenomena of “state patriotism” or “state nationalism” (Hobsbawm 1993: 91, 94, 101), or “official nationalism” (Anderson 1990: 77–100) appeared during the 17th and 18th centuries when following the revolutions (UK (Cromwell),

identity different from the state one is built, while the formation of a local parliament not only allows the attributes of statehood, but it also provides an arena for party competition at a regional level, which additionally stimulates nationalism and secessionism. Albeit, all these phenomena are interlinked and cannot easily be detached from one another; for the sake of simplicity, three arguments within the theory of subversive institutions will be developed: institution building, identity building, and elite building, the latter including party competition.

Argument 1 – Institution building, “state-in-waiting”

Devolution, that is, the transfer of power from the central to the regional level, empowers the region with the representative institutions aspiring to represent their region, and in the case of a multinational state, a nominal minority nation. Autonomy provides them with “many features of state...banners, leaders,...schools and political systems” (Greer 2007: 8). Some authors explain the stronger presence of secessionist movements in decentralized states like Spain or the United Kingdom by the level of transferred power. Especially, as has been demonstrated by the example of Scotland, where the process of devolution stimulated a nationalism and secessionism that almost had not existed before. An autonomous region has defined borders within which it can hold a referendum on independence (plebiscite); its institutions can serve as a “state-in-the-making” (Bunce 1999: 84), so the autonomy can often be regarded as a “first step” towards independence (Balcells et al. 2012: 12). Martinez-Herrera (2008) found that in the cases examined, secessionism has increased after decentralization because, among other reasons, the nationalist “entrepreneurs” use the new existing opportunities offered by the institutions of autonomy, and can “spread their message more effectively” (6), on account of the fact that “institutions raise the capacity of groups to act” (Cornell 2002: 15–16). As mentioned above, the existence of autonomy had an important role

Netherlands, US War of Independence, France) the dynastic principle was delegitimized. Monarchs, in search of a new source of legitimacy for their power, created a cult of the nation, which they represented and incorporated. With the passage of time, especially with the general progress and wide societal changes, the introduction of general conscription, general education, the strengthening of the state administration and press, followed by other media, state or official nationalism spreads. It spreads by help of the state and its institutions, the media under its control, through children raised in the patriotic spirit. A nation is built.

in the breakup of the former communist federations the USSR, CSFR, and SFRY (Bunce 1999; Duerr 2009), but also in ethnic conflicts that have not led to the breakup of states, like in the cases of the autonomous republics of the ex-USSR (Cornell 2002).

Ezgi (2010) also argues that the institutions of autonomy can increase secessionism, particularly where the causes⁶ of the grievances of the minority population are of a symbolic nature. Not only does the minority find the autonomy dissatisfactory, but the autonomy also facilitates the secession, providing capacity for it. It acts, therefore, as a “subversive institution”. Federalism acts as an administrative capacity building instrument for a potentially secessionist region. The regional government has an authority over the territory, which corresponds to the territory of a potential new state – that is, it has more or less established borders. With the regional government, the local population “learns” to govern and organize its own administration (for its potentially independent state). A federal state actually offers the “opportunity structure for peripheral nationalism” and a possibility to build up the administrative apparatus of a nucleus, a proto-state of a potential independent state (Mansvelt Beck 2005: 70, 76, 176). Consequently, in case of secession, the new “nation-state” already has control over state institutions, which diminishes the costs of state building and makes secession less costly, and, as a result, more attractive (Ezgi 2010: 7–10). Therefore Bunce (1999) calls institutions of autonomy “ready-made institutions” (for secession), while Erk and Anderson (2009) call this phenomenon the “paradox of federalism” (197), because federalism makes the dissolution of the state easier.

There are also quantitative researches that confirm the theory of subversive institutions. For example, states where an ethnic minority represents a third of the population, if it is unitary, have only an 8.9% probability of experiencing conflict, but this percentage rises to high 50.3% if they are symmetric federations, and an alarming 95.3% in the case of asymmetric federations (Roeder n.d.: 30, 32). In federal states there are

6 The causes of the grievances of the minority population, after Ezgi, can be tangible or symbolic. If they are tangible, concrete, of financial or material nature, but also of political and cultural nature, that is, if the minority complains of the economic stagnation or exploitation, political underrepresentation, cultural assimilation and so on, its grievances can be relatively easily accommodated by economic federalism and financial concessions, e.g. higher money transfers, cultural and political autonomy, etc. If, however, the causes of the grievances of the local population, or ethnic minority are of a symbolic, identity-based nature, where the minority simply wants its state, independence, state symbols, like the flag, anthem, membership in international organizations or football team at the World Championship, then federalism and concessions from the central state simply cannot satisfy it (Ezgi 2010:1–11).

statistically considerably more secessionist acts, and with the existing level of autonomy (such as administrative, executive, legislative capacities and two chamber parliament), each additional element of autonomy increases the preference for secession. That is, the more a region has autonomy, the higher the probability of secessionism (Ezgi 2010: 12–23).⁷

Argument 2 – Identity building

Decentralization and regional governments create and strengthen regional identities by means of education, culture and the media, which are instruments of nation-building and a way of spreading a national idea, “building identification with the political community” (Martinez-Herrera 2008: 10). As the competences in these areas pass from the central state to regional institutions, the latter are now in a position to form a political community different from the state one. Autonomous regions thereby acquire “instruments for promoting ethnic identity” (Cornell 2002: 17). For instance, governments and parliaments can enact acts and laws on special protection of the minority language through education and the media, etc.⁸ Exactly this process has been followed in the Spanish Basque Country, and has been absent in the French part of Basque Country.

Not only does the autonomy “help maintain a distinct group identity” (Balcells et al. 2012: 5), but it also “projects political aspirations of sub-state communities” (Moreno 2006: 16; Padjen 1991), thus strengthening or even creating new identities – as in, for example, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Croatia (Moreno 2006; Tomaić⁹ 2012). The newly formed Spanish autonomous communities, which had no previous historical tradition, nor separate language or culture, wishing to endow themselves with more legitimacy, started to construct, and even invent their symbols, flag, coat

7 In his article, Ezgi (2010) published some interesting results of quantitative research, statistical analysis, using the data from the *Minorities at Risk* database, *World Development Indicators*, etc., from 1339 observations. His research shows that with 99% significance level one can conclude that in federal systems there are statistically more secessionist acts.

8 For instance, the Spanish Basque Country enacted *LEY básica de normalización del uso del Euskera*, 1982; *Plan General de Promoción del Uso del Euskera*, 1999, etc.

9 Tomaić (2012) shows how autonomy and regionalism can lead to the creation of new, regional identities, in this case, an Istrian one, promoted by the Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS), by which not only they strengthened regionalism, but indirectly also secessionism.

of arms, anthem, historical memories, founding fathers or father of the “nation”, even the language specifics, even though they speak the same, Castilian Spanish language (Ruggiu 2012).¹⁰

Argument 3 – Elite building

Autonomy fosters the creation of a regional party system, a local media system, and local leaders that promote the nationalist message (Balcells et al. 2012: 3–7). Of course, with local parliaments, parties, and leaders, not only does it enable, but it also fosters elite building, as well as party competition in local patriotism. It brings us back to the theory of subversive institutions, while the same leaders, who owe their position and legitimacy to the decision of the central authorities to decentralize the state, get an opportunity to use their position and power against the same state. They might do it by articulating their voice or mobilizing the masses against the state, as leaders in a fight for more autonomy or even for independence, or as the future leaders of a potentially new independent state. Thus, the decentralized institutions of autonomy for future leaders and elites represent “political opportunity structures” (Martínez-Herrera 2008; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Kitschelt 1986, Tarrow 1988). Brancati (2006: 6) speaks about “contrasting effects of political decentralization”. With respect to the example of Spanish regionalist parties, it is evident that the decentralization has had the impact of strengthening regionalist parties, not only in those regions which have a distinct ethno-linguistic identity from the Spanish mainstream, like the Basque Country and Catalonia, but even in the regions which have never had such a distinct identity (ibid: 662).¹¹

10 Ruggiu (2012) refers to a wave of reforms of the statutes of autonomy in Spain in the period 2006–2008, initiated with the Catalan example in 2006. Interesting enough, following Catalonia, which had had its own historic continuity and statehood, as well as language and cultural specifics, other autonomous communities (regions) started constructing their own symbols. E.g. Castile-León, the cradle of Castilian Spanish language, having no separate language as Catalonia, stresses the fact it is the place where Castilian Spanish was born. Andalusia, on the other hand, stresses its own accent of Castilian Spanish, and its origins in flamenco. Moreover, it claims a kind of “ownership” over it (Ruggiu 2012: 21–22).

11 Brancati, in his research, uses data from 30 states, from the period 1985–2000, and comes to interesting conclusions. Decentralization diminishes ethnic conflict, but on the other hand, regionalist parties increase it, and we have to take into account their interaction. Consequently, his research shows that decentralization diminishes conflicts, if the regional parties are weak, but increases them (“subversive character”), if the parties are strong (2006: 675).

The above-mentioned *avalanche* of regionalism and regional identity constructions, which has happened recently in Spain, has been partially caused by political and party competitions reasons, in order to legitimize the local elites (Ruggiu 2012). Party competition, appeared as a result of the existence of the “autonomous” institutions (parliaments), facilitated the collapse of former communist federations (Padjen 1991: 44; see also Giuliano 2006). In the case of Scotland, for instance, the party competition preceded and brought about Scottish autonomy, and later, as elsewhere, contributed to an increase in secessionist sentiment (Erk and Anderson 2009: 199–201).

Critique and limitations of the theory of “subversive institutions”

Institutions of autonomy get a “subversive” character when certain conditions have been met, but we can never take into consideration all the possible situations and conditions of the examined societal phenomena. Otherwise, we would face a classical problem of “too few cases/too many variables” (Peters 1998; Lijphart 1971; Goggin 1986). Therefore, only some of the noticed limitations of our hypothesis (the theory of subversive institutions), which are the most important for the arguments of this paper, will be mentioned; namely, to what extent the institutions of autonomy will indeed act as “subversive” and lead to stronger peripheral nationalism and secessionism.

The first precondition for the secession of autonomous (federal) units is of course the existence of a strong distinct identity of the ethnic community. Some authors mention the issue of immigration, which induces a sense of threat and xenophobia among the minority population, and fosters secessionism as an attempt to respond to the identity loss and to the societal implications that immigration brings along (Conversi 2000a; Mansvelt Beck 2005). On the other hand, partially as a consequence of immigration and of the mixing of the population, and partially as a result of the process of the nation-building at the state (federal) level, a problem of a dual, mixed, split or overlapping identity has been observed. It appears

in multinational states, where the population of the region feels, up to a certain extent, loyalty and allegiance towards two homelands – the local homeland, that is, to the region, and the wider homeland that the state represents, the country of which the region is a part. In the case of Basques, there are two allegiances and affiliations; to the Basque Country, on the one hand, and to Spain or France, on the other.

Some authors relate the “subversiveness” of institutions to economic development. With respect to the example of the several Russian autonomous republics in the period 1987–1992, Giuliano (2006) argues that secessionism appeared out of the fear of losing control over the economic resources. From the four examples he had examined, Galicia and Catalonia in Spain, Scotland in the United Kingdom and Quebec in Canada, Martínez-Herrera (2008) noted that only Galicia, which was economically less developed, did not experience a more significant rise in secessionism. On the other hand, the other three regions, which were relatively rich, experienced a growth in secessionism. He explains it, on the one hand, by the differing interests of the local economic elites compared with the elites from the political centre. Local elites help the local nationalist intelligentsia, which in turn mobilizes the masses in its interest – that is, in the interest of the region.

Finally, being better off in a wider community (state) entails state-wide solidarity and the transfer of funds from richer to poorer regions. This argument, in the Spanish case, is valid more for Catalonia, than for the Basque Country, given that the latter enjoys a privileged status with its *Concierto Económico* (Economic Agreement, i.e. Fiscal Pact). However, it is also one of the economic grievances of the nationalists. For instance, under the provisions of the *Concierto Económico*, Euskadi's contribution to the Spanish budget is 6,24%, while its GDP was 6,21% of the Spanish one in 2014, but its population is only 4,65%. It “pays according to its revenue, but receives according to its population”, which means that Euskadi is “overcontributing almost 33%” (*sobreaportación*) (Álvarez, 2013).

Also, the richness entails more immigration from other regions, which in turn increases the feeling of there being a threat to the local population and xenophobia. The local nationalists see the solution to the problem in secession (Martínez-Herrera, 2008: 15–20). This argument has been valid

with respect to the Spanish Basque Country, in the past – at the end of 19th century, when the founder of the Basque nationalism Sabino Arana formulated the Basque nationalist ideology, in the 1960s, but also today. That is to say, the Spanish Basque Country has during all those periods, as one of the most prosperous parts of Spain, been exposed to big waves of immigration from other Spanish regions. "...Political decentralisation in relatively wealthy culturally differentiated regional minorities...seems to further fuel inclinations for separation" (ibid: 18).

If the institutions of autonomy in ethno-federal states indeed work as "subversive institutions", are the states aware of that situation and do they attempt to prevent it? We argue that the answer to both questions is affirmative and obvious. Proofs and examples are numerous. There is a whole arsenal of "arms" against the "subversive influence" of institutions of autonomy, which we could refer to as "counter-subversive" action of the state. It ranges from state-building and state/official nationalism, the actions of different state institutions, and state public policies, like social policy, public and secret diplomacy, up to the use of coercive institutions, like the army, police or secret service. With all these, the state prevents and diminishes the "subversive" influence of autonomy and the potential for secessionism ("counter-subversive" action).

State nationalism, if the schools have been already under control of local, "autonomous" institutions, can act through the media, culture, sports and other propaganda, which strengthen state (national) spirit and unity. For instance, in the case of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, the Spanish state can foster a Spanish national spirit through sports events (Olympics, World Championships) whereby supporting the Spanish national team, Spanish patriotism is being encouraged.

Some more examples of such state actions, with respect to our cases of France and Spain, could be mentioned. Both states show a consciousness, even a fear of "subversive institutions", and attempt to prevent or mitigate their impact. Some examples are a result of successful "counter-subversive" actions of the state. France, due to its centralized *polity* and *Jacobine* idea of a unitary and civic state, since the French revolution in 1789, has not embraced regionalism, as if it had wanted to prevent any "subversive influence" of institutions by offering "opportunity structures"

to regional, peripheral nationalism. Mansvelt Back quotes the reports by the French Ministry of Interior, which oppose to the creation of the Basque *département* because they see a threat of secessionism in it (2005: 123). France, in spite of some attempts in the 1980s, has not let the three Basque provinces (Soule, Basse-Navarre, Labourd) achieve territorial unity, in the form of a single administrative unit (*département*). Thus, it has prevented the potential “subversive” implications of such institutions, which could never come about simply because those institutions have not been allowed to be set up in the first place. Consequently, in the French Basque Country there is no secessionism, not even a well articulated regionalist movement which could create a critical mass of pressure on the central government to establish a single Basque *département*. Precisely the “absence or the fail of devolution processes could partially help to understand why some cultural communities in France...have not developed a secessionist strategy beyond some marginal movements” (Balcells et al. 2012: 4), because the minorities have no “autonomous political unit under which they can organize and mobilize” (ibid: 12).

In contrast, the Kingdom of Spain, after Franco's death in 1975, has undergone a fundamental state reconstruction based on a quasi-federal principle. However, it intentionally avoided mentioning the term “federation” in the Constitution of 1978, exactly with the purpose to avoid giving too much importance and “subversive” character to the autonomous communities (Moreno 2006: 4). The decision not to give autonomy just to a small number of so-called “historical nationalities”, but to give it to all Spanish regions (popularly called “café para todos”, a “coffee for all” phenomenon) resulted in the foundation of seventeen *autonomous communities*. The decision aimed at diminishing “the subversive influence that Catalan and Basque identities contain” (Ruggiu 2012: 16), that is, to “dilute” Catalan and Basque nationalism.¹²

Finally, we should not neglect the actors, elites, and leaders, i.e. the relation between structure and agency. The successful, competent, and charismatic leader (of a minority or of a regional government) can compensate for and overcome the institutional vacuum. Conversely, an

12 As a consequence, however, a collateral, undesired effect of the rise of (other) regionalism(s) and of (other) regional identities in Spain has come out of it, which could also have a “subversive influence”. Thus there is an ironic inversion of intentions, where the central authorities, in order to diminish the “subversiveness” of Basque and Catalan nationalism, fosters regionalism and subsequently, “subversive institutions” in other parts of Spain.

incompetent and uncharismatic leader will not be capable of taking full advantage of all the opportunities and authority that the existing institutions offer him/her.

Case study – Spanish and French Basque Country

Introduction

In this short case study, a dual comparison of two cases, Spanish and French Basque Country, and the most similar systems design will be used. The most similar systems design holds that the two cases share many common features, and differ in only one. For instance, French and Spanish Basque Country are situated in the same region, share a common language and ethnic origins; they are both part of wider nation-states, face the situation of diglossia, etc. A differing feature, in this case the autonomy in the Spanish Basque Country – Autonomous Community of the Basque Country – Euskadi, is held responsible for the different outcome (stronger peripheral nationalism and secessionism).

The most similar systems design is of course a useful tool and a way to compare the two cases, as well as to explore, in trying to prove, the causal mechanism between the independent variable (autonomy) and dependent variable (stronger peripheral nationalism and secessionism). However, this dual comparison or binary analysis, a comparative study with only two cases, involves simplification and reduction, bringing about the famous problem of “Too Few Cases/Too Many Variables” to an extreme (Peters 1998; Lijphart 1971; Goggin 1986).¹³ Although the Spanish and the French Basque Country can be considered as most similar cases, it does not mean that literally all their features are similar, save just one (autonomy). In the political and social sciences this is obviously impossible.

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13 For more about the problems of dual comparison, see Tarrow (2010).

In the examined cases, other differences can be found as well, like different historical paths and backgrounds. For instance, Franco's dictatorship in Spain, and its harsh attitude towards the Basques (see e.g. Conversi 2000a), is often considered to be responsible for the terrorism of ETA, and consequently for a stronger Basque nationalism and secessionism in the Spanish Basque Country. The French Basque Country, on the other hand, has not experienced dictatorship, nor stronger Basque nationalism or secessionism.

It is true that Franco's legacy had a huge impact on Basque society in the Spanish Basque Country. It gave rise to terrorism, stronger nationalism, and secessionism. It strengthened Basque identity, but also had an impact on two other features I examine in my paper – institutions and elite building. In other words, the autonomy gained in Spain is also a result of Franco's legacy. The results of the accumulated grievances during Franco's era; the tensions, mass protests, and terrorist attacks not only in the Spanish Basque Country but throughout Spain, helped in pressuring Spanish leaders to compromise with regionalists and autonomists (and secessionists). That compromise resulted in the Basque Country being given autonomy, along with Catalonia and other regions in the new Spanish Estado de autonomías (State of Autonomies).

In France, in contrast, there was no dictatorship. Therefore, no grievances were present that were so strong such as to lead to terrorism or mass protests to put pressure on the state to gain autonomy. The grievances of the French Basques, which were much weaker, had consequently weaker results – instead of full-fledged territorial autonomic institutions, French Basques got various consultative bodies and development strategies. Likewise, the importance of the Basque nationalists (*abertzale*) in the Spanish Basque Country, which are reflected in their prevalence within the (Spanish) Basque Parliament, could never have been matched by the strength of the Basque nationalists on the French side, simply because in France there had been no resentment from the harsh Franco's dictatorship. Therefore, the grievances, and consequently the Basque nationalism and secessionism, on the French side were much weaker.

However, while admitting the importance and influence of Franco's legacy on the actual Basque nationalism and institutional set-up

(autonomy in the Spanish Basque Country and its absence in the French Basque Country), I am not taking into account Franco's legacy as another independent variable, for several reasons. Namely, I try to avoid the aforementioned problem of "too many variables, too few cases", which necessarily results in some simplification. It is also because the focus of my research is concentrated on the further effects of the new institutional set-up (autonomic institutions) in the Spanish Basque Country on Basque nationalism and secessionism, in comparison and contrast to the institutional set-up of the French Basque Country (unitary state, absence of autonomy). That is, in this paper I try to examine to what extent the autonomy, which is an indirect result of Franco's dictatorship, once it had been set up in the Spanish Basque Country in 1978, further contributed, or might further contribute, to a rise of Basque nationalism and secessionism.

Autonomy will be measured by the extent of the local autonomy, i.e. existing local institutions as well as their competences. Peripheral nationalism and secessionism will be measured by several criteria; the strength of Basque identity; the "Basque direction" of the local public policies, notably with respect to the language and language education policy, since the Basque language is one of the main core values of Basque national identity; the strength of the Basque nationalist parties in local Parliament/Council of the Department; elite building and reproducing; and sovereignist/secessionist attempts.

The Case Study will follow the three arguments of the theory of subversive institutions, effects on institution or "segment-state" building, identity building and elite building.

Argument 1 – Institution building

In Spain, autonomous communities, after the 1978 Constitution, control almost the entire state administration. One of the 17 autonomous communities, Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (Euskadi) has a clearly defined territory, a democratically elected Parliament

(officially called the *Basque Parliament*), a Government, officially called the *Basque Government*, ministries (called *departamentos*, departments, headed by *consejeros*, counsellors), a Prime Minister, *lehendakari*, with some prerogatives of a President, including state honours and a palace. His office includes a mini Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Acción Exterior*,¹⁴ External Action), with its delegations abroad. Thus, the Basque Government can project its image abroad. The autonomous administration has some 60,000 employees, to which one has to add the 30,000 employees of the provincial and communal administration, and disposes of a €10.6 billion budget. At the same time, the central state administration in the Basque Country counts only 15,000 employees (Muñoz, 2009). Euskadi disposes of its own police force *Ertzaintza*. As mentioned before, several authors argue that with such a developed administrative apparatus, a "segment-state", in our case the Spanish Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (Euskadi), has "ready-made institutions" of a potential sovereign state ("proto-state", "state-in-waiting"), which diminishes the costs of a potential secession (Ezgi 2010; Bunce 1999; Mansvelt Beck 2005; Roeder 2007, 2009). Finally, a democratically elected Parliament, even without external, international sovereignty, possesses a democratic legitimacy and its Laws and Declarations have a certain weight.

In France, the Basques have no territorial autonomy or a separate territorial unit, and due to a unitary and civic state, neither of the above-mentioned institutions have existed. When referring to *Pays Basque* (French Basque Country), one actually refers to the three historical "Basque provinces" of the Northern Basque Country, which with historical events became part of France. Apart from a certain cultural autonomy,¹⁵ and some consultative institutions specifically designed to attenuate local grievances,¹⁶ but with no executive or financial powers, the French Basque Country enjoys no territorial autonomy. As a matter of fact, provinces acting as local administrative units have existed since the French revolution; the provinces have been integrated into wider administrative units, departments. There is no Basque department in France, while the three Basque provinces have been integrated with another "completely French" province, Bearn,

14 More on *Acción Exterior*'s web site: <https://www.euskadi.eus/r48-subaccio/es>

15 For example, the existence and the activities of the Public Office of the Basque Language and the Basque Cultural Institute, presence of the Basque language in schools

16 The Council of Development of the Basque Country and The Council of the Elected Representatives of the Basque Country.

into the Département Pyrénées Atlantiques. For last couple of decades, Basque nationalists in France have claimed “a Basque département”. Instead of a département, following the 1995 Loi Pasqua, the Basque Country in 1997 got only a status of a pays (country, shire, homeland), a quasi-territorial structure with no executive or financial powers, which since then got other 370 pays in France. So, the French Basque Country, except on a tourist map, or as a virtual notion of a pays, has no clearly defined territory, nor Parliament, Government, budget, administration, let alone a kind of Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a police force. There are no “ready-made institutions” for any kind of a potential sovereign state. From an institutional point of view, secession is unimaginable.

Argument 2 – Identity building

A new nation-building process can be seen in the Spanish Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (Euskadi), where the Basque nationalists have been in power for most of the post-1978 Constitution period.¹⁷ Its institutions are consequently able to act as centrifugal (“subversive”) institutions, transmitting nationalist messages through the media, the educational system, and regional institutions. But their nationalist message is not of Spanish, but of peripheral, in this case Basque, nationalism. Streets are named after the founder of Basque nationalism, “exclusive” Sabino Arana, who advocated for an ethnic definition of “Basqueness”; the Spanish flag and symbols of Spanish power are absent from public places,¹⁸ and in certain Basque textbooks one feels an antagonism towards everything Spanish (Mansvelt Beck 2005: 159–160).¹⁹ Given the specific, unfavourable linguistic situation of *diglossia*,²⁰ and the importance of language for national (and Basque) identity, as argued by many scholars (Anderson 1990; Smith 2003; Hobsbawm 1993; Conversi 2000a; Costa-

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17 More on this in the following section (Argument 3)

18 E.g. the king, symbol of Spanish-Castilian domination, has been taken out from the traditional coat of arms of Guipuzcoa, which for that reason had to be changed (Mansvelt Beck 2005: 159).

19 The content of certain schoolbooks ... stimulate hatred of all that is Spanish" (Mansvelt Beck 2005: 160).

20 The parallel use of two languages – Spanish and Basque – where Spanish has for been centuries dominating the public sphere and Basque has been mainly reduced to family and private life. Gellner uses the terms “high” and “low culture” (1998).

Font and Tremosa-Balcells 2006), Basque governments have taken it as a mission to restore to the Basque language the status of a full-fledged official and educational language, in the sense of Gellner's "language of high culture" (Apaolaza Beraza 2004). (Re)introducing the Basque language not only in schools and universities, but literally everywhere, *rebasquisating* Euskadi, the Basque identity is (re)enforced. Nowadays almost all institutions under the control of local, autonomous institutions in the Spanish Basque Country are obliged to adopt Action plans or Five-year plans for *language normalization*, that is, to reinforce the use of the Basque language.²¹ The Basque Government in that way projects certain ideology and builds up and strengthens the Basque national identity. A new, Basque nation is being built (Tejerina 1999: 76).

The statistics speak for themselves. Before the autonomy, that is, before 1978/1980, the language of education was 100% Spanish. Nowadays, only a tiny 0.5% of students study exclusively in Spanish (so called Model X), and 15.3% in Model A, with education in Spanish, and the Basque language as one of the subjects. 18.9% study in bilingual schools (Model B) and most, 65.3%, study in Basque schools (Model D), with Spanish language as one of the subjects (Eustat, 2015). The presence of the Basque language is enforced in other areas as well. For instance, in public administration the percentage of Basque speakers should be 48.46% and it rises in accordance with the rise of knowledge of the Basque language in general population. Also, the presence of the Basque language is checked regularly in yearly evaluation reports. In the Parliament, in the 2005–2009 legislature, 56% of the deputies spoke Basque, while in 2013 the percentage had risen to 68,5% (Plan de normalización, Parlamento Vasco [2013–2017]: 36). At the University of the Basque Country, in the Academic year 1995/1996, 27.2% of the students studied in Basque, while in 2013/2014 the percentage had risen to 64.3%. The number of bilingual professors (Basque and Spanish) rose from 35.1% in 2006 to 47.8% in 2013 (II Plan Director del Euskera de la UPV: 10,15,33). Similar developments can be seen everywhere.

As far as identity is concerned, 35% of the interviewees declare themselves as "only Basque", 21% as "more Basque than Spanish", 35%

21 E.g. Plan de Normalización del Uso del Euskera en la Administración Pública de la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco para el periodo 1998–2002 (BOPV de 27 de noviembre de 1998). Extended till 2003. (BOPV de 5 de febrero de 2003); Plan de Normalización del Uso del Euskera en la Administración Pública de la Comunidad Autónoma del País Vasco para el periodo 2003–2007 (BOPV de 8 de septiembre de 2004); Plan de Normalización del Uso del Euskera en el Gobierno Vasco para el IV periodo de planificación (2008–2012) (BOPV de 7 de agosto de 2008).

"equally Basque and Spanish", 3% "more Spanish", and 3% "only Spanish" (Euskobarometro, Mayo 2015, grafico 26). As can be noticed, Basque identity is most prevalent, with a significant percentage of people claiming dual identity. The number of people who identify as having Spanish identity (more or exclusively Spanish) is quite low. Opinion polls also testify to the presence of a strong local (Basque) patriotism, and, at the same time, mistrust in State (Spanish) institutions. For example, 62% of the interviewees had trust in the Basque Government, 61% in the Basque Parliament and Basque police *Ertzaintza*, while only 39% had trust in the King, 15% in the Spanish Cortes, and 11% in the Spanish Government (Euskobarometro Noviembre 2014, grafico 14). Trust in the Basque Prime Minister is 56%, while in the Spanish Prime Minister it is only 7% (ibid, grafico 22). Regarding the attitude towards secessionism, 35% of the interviewees support the present autonomous status, 29% favour federation (which involves a more autonomy), 7% favour more centralization, and 25% favour secession. Although the latter figure alone seems low as a proof of secessionism in the strict sense, the first two figures could be added if secessionism is regarded in a wider sense (as peripheral nationalism, autonomism and secessionism). From the data above, the conclusion can be drawn that the process of Basque nation building has maybe not yet finished, but it is well underway and there is a "Basque direction" to the Euskadi.

In the French Basque Country, even though it is more and more present in schools, society and public institutions, the Basque language still does not enjoy official status. The improvement in the linguistic situation owes only partially to the authorities. However, there is an immense difference from Spain. The French state after the 1980s allowed more freedom and space for "regional languages" to be taught, but did not impose it, force it via "dictate", as was the case in the Spanish Autonomous Community of Euskadi. The main credit for the improvement of status of the Basque language is due to the efforts of civil society associations and citizens themselves. The results, comparing the Spanish and the French Basque Country, vary accordingly. Only 36,6% of schoolchildren attend some Basque language classes (OPLB, Rentree 2013), while in Spanish Basque Country it is 99,5%. There is the Public Office of the Basque Language (OPLB), which helps and promotes the teaching of the Basque language in the French Basque Country, but it has no authority to impose Basque language in education as the *Viceconsejería de Política Lingüística* of the Gobierno Vasco and the Gobierno Vasco in the

Spanish Basque Country do. Only 11% of the interviewees feel “only Basque”, 5% “more Basque”, 24% “equally Basque and French”, 16% “more French” and 36% “only French” (Baxok et al. 2006). In the French Basque Country, French identity and French language in education and in society prevail. There is no “Basque direction” or Basque nation building process.

Argument 3 – Elite building

In the Spanish Basque Country, Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (Euskadi), there is the local (Basque) Parliament, where the Basque nationalists have dominated since the first elections after the establishment of autonomy (in 1980), with an average of 60% of the votes/seats in the Basque Parliament, except for the period 2009–2012 (due to the ban of the Basque radicals before the elections) (Gobierno Vasco; Archivo resultados electorales). In the current legislature, the nationalists (moderate PNV-EAJ²² and radical EH Bildu²³) have 48 out of 75 seats. That means that, for example, they have been able to impose a “Basque direction”, e.g. policies of *rebasquization* (*language normalization*), or vote the *Ibarretxe Plan* (see next section). There are also numerous examples of party competition in nationalism and local patriotism, e.g. the issue of Basque language use, flag, coat of arms, or anthem. For instance, the strongest party, the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV-EAJ), trying to prove its “Basqueness” to the harder Basque nationalists, have tried to impose the use of the Basque language at the level of the whole Autonomous Community, from the “autonomous”

22 PNV, the Basque Nationalist Party, *Partido nacionalista vasco* (in Basque language – EAJ, *Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea*) is the oldest and the strongest Basque political party. The moderate nationalist party of the centre-right. PNV, which defines itself as “Basque, democratic, participative, pluralistic, non-confessional and humanistic party, open to progress”, talks about a “Basque nation, whose political being needs to be expressed by restoration of national sovereignty”, and “considers Basque language (euskera) as Basque national language and requests that its normalisation be considered as national responsibility” (PNV website, www.eaj-pnv.eu). PNV won the elections for the first autonomous Basque Parliament in 1980 with 38,1% of the vote (Gobierno Vasco, Archivo resultados electorales). Ever since, apart from the period 2009–2012, PNV has been in power and formed the Basque Government, either in coalition, or alone. All of the Basque prime ministers (Lehendakari) since 1980, apart from the period of 2009–2012, were members of PNV. With the passage of time, PNV became a Basque catch-all party (Hague, Harrop, Breslin, 2001: 213). In the current Basque Parliament (2012–2016), PNV, with 34% of the the vote, holds 27 out of 75 seats (EITB, www.eitb.eus).

23 *EH Bildu*, the second largest Basque party, is actually a coalition of various leftist and radical parties and groups of Basque nationalists. It is “more nationalist” (sovereignist or even secessionist) than the PNV. In the current Basque Parliament (2012–2016), EH Bildu, with 25% of the vote, holds 21 out of 75 seats. It is kind of a successor party (coalition) of various leftist radical Basque nationalist parties, like *Herri Batasuna* (National Unity, HB), *Euskal Herriarrok* (Basque citizens, EH), *Batasuna* (Unity), *Euskal Herrialdeetako Alderdi Komunista* (The Communist Party of the Basque Homelands, EHAK) which were outlawed by the Spanish Supreme Court or were under threat of being outlawed for their connection or support to ETA.

administration, Parliament,²⁴ health care system, education and University, although it is itself culturally and linguistically mainly Spanish speaking.

In the French Basque Country, due to the non-existence of a local Parliament or self-rule, there are no such phenomena. There have for decades been Basque nationalist parties, and they get up to 10% of the vote. Nowadays, there is also a Basque nationalist party, AB (*Abertzaleen Batasuna*), which is relatively successful at the lower, communal level, having around 100 councillors. However, the non-existence of a Basque administrative unit, *département*, combined with the centralised French electoral and administrative system, results in a situation where only two Basque nationalist councillors managed to enter the General Council of the *Département Pyrénées-Atlantiques*, of which French Basque Country is a part. And there they are only two of the 54 councillors. Therefore, even if at the lower, communal level, Basques nationalists can enter the local communes and be part of ruling coalitions, or form associations of local councillors and mayors, they cannot impose a more "Basque direction" on the whole French Basque Country, like their Spanish Basque counterparts.

The autonomy, embodied in the Euskadi's Basque parliament, enabled Basque nationalists in the Spanish Basque Country (Autonomous Community of the Basque Country [Euskadi]) to come to power at the local level and to direct the (Spanish) Basque Country towards a "Basque direction". In addition, it helped also to build up their own elites – party elites and leaders, Government and Parliament dignitaries, above all the Prime Minister (*Lehendakari*), local public company managers, University, Academy, institute directors, etc. If a potential future new country needs the infrastructure (i.e. state administration, a kind of *hardware*), it also needs leaders (a *software* and IT experts). And here they are! Not only are they in place, but they are also in power! Finally, having their own Basque University will help to reproduce new Basque elites.

In contrast, the French Basque Country does not possess almost any of the above. The difference produced by autonomy is immense.

24 As a consequence, e.g. in the Basque parliament, statistics are being put together about the telephone conversations in the Basque language, where the conversations are being listened to, and one of the conclusions is that "most conversations are starting in Basque, and then continuing in Spanish". See *Plan de normalización del uso de euskera en la administración del Parlamento Vasco* (2013-2017), p.12; Parlamento Vasco; Dirección de Organización y Recursos Humanos.

Ibarretxe Plan – Peak and limit of autonomy

The Government of Juan Jose Ibarretxe, Euskadi's Prime Minister (*Lehendakari*) from 1999 to 2009, will remain one of the most interesting in the few decades of the Spanish Basque Country's autonomy. His controversial 2003 *Proposal for Reform of the Political Statute of Community of Euskadi*, popularly known as *Ibarretxe Plan*, was actually a proposal for a confederation between the Basque Country and Spain. The relations between them would be based on a "free association" (Art.1). Without going into the details of the proposal, suffice to say that, had it been enacted, even without a completely independent Basque Country, it would have meant the end of Spain as we know it today.

The Plan was approved by the Basque Government on 25 October 2003, and a year later, on 30 December 2004, by the Basque Parliament, although with a narrow majority of 39 out of 75 votes (that is, only 1 vote above the minimum of 38 votes needed for a simple majority). However, in order to be enacted, the proposal needed to pass in the Spanish Parliament. And there, it was rejected without discussion. That was not surprising.

Today a Spanish "carte blanche" for an independent Basque Country seems completely unimaginable. Nevertheless, remembering the "velvet divorce" of the Czech and Slovak Republics, one cannot exclude that, with a different set of challenging conditions and leaders in Madrid and Euskadi, bearing in mind as well the development of situation in Catalonia, a "new Ibarretxe Plan" that might lead to a "velvet divorce" and an independent Basque Country, could become a reality.

To conclude, the autonomy enabled institutions (Parliament/Argument 1) nurtured Basque identity (Argument 2), enabled Basque nationalists to come to power, created a space for Basque elites and leaders, and created the space and even the incentives for party competition in Basque nationalism (Argument 3). The thing the autonomy has not produced, and that is missing for secessionists, is a "window of opportunity" (Bunce 1999). But if the "window" opens, as in the case of, for example, the

Czechoslovak “velvet divorce”, an opportunity for a potential sovereign Basque state could be created.

Conclusion

The hypothesis that institutions of autonomy or federal institutions that follow ethno-linguistic patterns foster stronger peripheral nationalism and secessionism has been examined in this paper – in other words, the thesis that institutions of autonomy act as “subversive institutions” towards the central state. For that purpose, a short case study, a dual comparison of the Spanish and the French Basque Country, has been made. They seem to be good samples on which test the hypothesis, because the Spanish Basque Country, Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (País Vasco, Euskadi), is an autonomous region with wide autonomy and almost all the attributes of a state. In contrast, the French Basque Country, apart from a modest and partial cultural autonomy, has no territorial or institutional autonomy. Using the notions and signs of the *Boolean algebra*, autonomy, as defined at the beginning of the article, in the Spanish Basque Country (Autonomous Community of Euskadi) could be signed as 1 (existing), while in the French Basque Country it would be noted as 0 (non-existing). Likewise, the existence of a “segment-state” or “ready-made institutions” of a potential new sovereign state would also be 1 for Euskadi, and 0 for the French *Pays Basque*.

Providing examples within the limits set by the scope of the paper, it has been demonstrated in what way the institutions in the Spanish Basque Country foster or could foster peripheral nationalism and secessionism, in contrast to the French Basque Country, underlining the differences arising from the distinct institutional set-ups. With the intention to avoid the problem of “too many variables, too few cases”, other potential explanatory variables, like, e.g., Franco's legacy and dictatorship versus the legacy of democracy in France have been left out.

The main arguments of our hypothesis are that, with the institutions of

autonomy, the region gains the capacities of a potential (independent) state, which facilitates the process of (proto-) state-building in an administrative and political sense, and diminishes the costs of institution building in the event of a potential secession. The local elites and leaders are being built – the Prime Minister, Government and Parliament – which have behind them democratic legitimacy, institutions, and financial backing. Institutions of autonomy facilitate collective action and make it possible to mobilize the masses in articulating secessionist policies and potential opposition to the central state. At the same time, it strengthens local patriotism – peripheral nationalism and secessionism. Finally, through the state (autonomous, regional) administration, education, media and cultural institutions, a sub-state (minority) national identity, distinct from the state identity, is being fostered. A new “nation-state” is being built, aided by *official nationalism*, whereby we encounter a change of paradigm or of loyalty. Instead of loyalty to the ex-employer, the (unitary) Spain, now the new (local “autonomous”) civil servants in the Autonomous Community are loyal to the new “autonomous” Government. The parallel processes are in place – institution building, elite building, and identity (nation-)building. These processes can be noticed in the Spanish Basque Country (“subversive institutions”), but not in the French Basque Country, or if they do exist, they are much weaker and informal, because of the lack of institutional underpinning.

If the dependent variable – stronger peripheral nationalism – is measured by the announced criteria, then by each of them, the Boolean algebra sign for the Spanish Basque Country (Euskadi) would be 1 (existing/strong), and for the French Basque Country (Pays Basque) 0 (non-existing, weak). While in Euskadi the nationalists have since 1980 scored around 60% of the votes in the Basque Parliament and dominated local politics for most of the time, in the French Pays Basque they have never received more than 10% of the vote and have always been quite irrelevant at the local regional level (except for the lower local level of the municipalities). The Basque identity has prevailed in Euskadi and the French in the Pays Basque. The Basque nationalists have been able to impose a “Basque direction” and an intensive “Basquization” through the language normalization policy in Euskadi, which has not been the case in Pays Basque. Finally, serious sovereignist/secessionist attempts – the Ibarretxe Plan occurred, materialized, and was voted for in the Basque Parliament of Euskadi, while

in the Pays Basque anything of a kind is beyond the imagination. There is no French Basque Government to conceive such a plan, no French Basque Parliament to act as a forum where such a plan could be voted on, and no prevalence of Basque nationalists to vote for such a plan. All of these phenomena are the direct or indirect results of the autonomy that has been allowed and fostered by the autonomic institutions in the Spanish Basque Country. Likewise, these are also missing in the French Basque Country due to the lack of autonomy.

Counter-arguments that defend the federalism, not only for reasons of the limits set by the scope of the paper, but also because of the strength of the arguments themselves, have not been quoted. They are strong enough to be valued, because they go deep into the core of federalism, the institutions of autonomy and their *raison d'être*. That is, the institutions of autonomy exist as a compromise between keeping the integrity of the state and a partial accommodation of grievances of the minority population.

Without denying the reason for the existence of ethno-federations (based on an ethno-linguistic principle), and institutions of autonomy as such, the hypothesis put forward is that the restructuring of a state on ethno-federal principle, although at a certain moment apparently a good or even the only viable solution – if the alternative is the breakup of the state – will not necessarily be a durable solution. It might result in the “paradox of federalism” (Erk and Anderson 2009), “subversive institutions” (Bunce 1999), and would probably give rise to stronger peripheral nationalism and secessionism, as proven by the case of the Spanish Basque Country, but also by Catalonia, Scotland, and Flanders.

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